

North Somerset Context Conference Terms of Reference 2025

Background

As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Extremist groups make use of the internet to radicalise and recruit and to promote extremist materials. Any potential harmful effects to individuals identified as vulnerable to extremist ideologies or being drawn into terrorism should also be considered.

Assessments of children in such cases should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life and are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. Children who may be alleged perpetrators should also be assessed to understand the impact of contextual issues on their safety and welfare. Interventions should focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children's social care. Assessments of children in such cases should consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. They should look at the parental capacity to support the child, including helping the parents and carers to understand any risks and support them to keep children safe and assess potential risk to child.

(Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018)

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse.

Contextual Safeguarding Theory suggests that in order to support vulnerable adolescents at risk in 1 settings outside of their home environments, a local response needs to be developed that identifies, assesses, and intervenes in all of the context of

adolescent vulnerability where the abuse and exploitation of young people can take place (Appendix 1).

With Contextual Safeguarding rather than removing children from environments where harm may happen a contextual approach tries to identify the ways in which professionals, adults and young people who have influence over the context can support the change of social conditions of environments in which abuse has occurred. A Context Safeguarding Conference brings agencies together to review the findings of a Context Assessment and develop an intervention plan to reduce identified risk using four domains (Appendix 2).

Aims of the Context Safeguarding Conference

The Context Safeguarding Conference seeks to:

- Bring together a multi-agency group representing key stakeholders within a statutory child protection framework and consider the assessment of an extra-familial context and the risks/strengths identified within it.
- To consider and task relevant and appropriate interventions to address the risks and build upon the strengths identified, to be delivered by children and family services and partner agencies.
- Share intelligence, data analysis and current interventions already in place the contexts under discussion and together define priority areas to respond to risks, build upon strengths and intervene effectively across associated peer groups, schools and public spaces.

Membership and attendance

Attendees will vary depending on the context but should include practitioners, agencies or community partners that can influence the context of concern. Consideration should include Children's Social Care, Education, Police and Community Safety, Local businesses and community organisations, relevant County and/or District Council departments.

Members are required to ensure representation at the Context Safeguarding Conference in their absence.

Frequency and length and venue

The duration of the conference will be for approximately 2 hours. The meeting will take place at a site agreed by the Chair and those who manage the context under discussion. A date for a review will be agreed at the close of the conference.

Structure of the meeting

The meeting will be chaired by either an Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Officer (ISRO) in the case of a peer-group context conference or by the Community Safety Partnership Manager or Turning Corners Chair in the case of a Neighbourhood Conference, or the Headteacher or DSL in the case of a School Context Conference. Conferences incorporate both safeguarding guidance and the contextual safeguarding framework to steer the discussion and consider the assessment that has been undertaken.

Role of the Lead Practitioner

The role of the lead practitioner is to present key issues (themes, patterns, trends, risks, vulnerabilities, strengths, capacity to safeguard) that have been identified during the assessment process. The lead practitioner should provide clarity on the methods undertaken to gather the information throughout the assessment process and should also clearly express the views of the young people impacted by extra-familial risk in said context (and their parents/carers) during this meeting. The lead practitioner should provide analysis and clear rationale of the context weighting factors that have emerged during the assessment and should make suggestions about an agreed way forward/outline plan. The Lead Practitioner will have oversight of the plan and be responsible for ensuring that objectives are met and actions are completed within the required timeframe.

Expectation of Partners

Partner agencies and organisations in attendance should provide reports/detailed briefings and information about the context in question. All partner agencies identified should attend and if unavailable, send another representative from their organisation to present their information. Partners are also expected to contribute towards the conference plan, action tasks within their respective organisations and complete these within a set and agreed timescale.

Information Sharing

Information and intelligence shared at the Context Safeguarding Conferences will be bound by the Information Sharing and Confidentiality Statement (see separate document).

Governance and Accountability

This meeting will be chaired/facilitated by the nominated chair. The Chair must ensure that there is sufficient time during the meeting (no less than 30 min) for professionals in attendance to discuss the suggested outline plan and to contribute to it. The Chair must also ensure that an action plan is finalised before and shared (verbally) with all before the meeting concludes.

At the end of the conference, a date should be set for a review meeting to take place no later than 3 months to the present date. The Chair will decide in consultation with partners regarding which agencies will be required to attend the review meeting. Arrangements for inviting the partners and key stakeholders to the review meeting should be facilitated by the lead practitioner or allocated team. In the event further concerns arise during the implementation of any agreed plan, the Lead practitioner might need to consider smaller, more frequent meetings in between dates for the Context Safeguarding Conference review meeting to add concerns to be addressed to the plan and to follow up on any progress that has been made. If more regular meetings have been held during the intervention phase, the review conference must still go ahead on the date agreed for the Chair to have full oversight of the context plan. In the event the meeting needs to be moved, express consent must be obtained by the Chair and a Review Meeting should be scheduled to take place within two weeks of the missed date.

Identified themes, trends and learning will be shared with the various strategic forums including the Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) panels and the North Somerset Safeguarding Partnership.